TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

CounterPunch

MARCH 16-31, 2008 ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR VOL. 15, NO. 6

Blind Whistling Phreaks and the FBI's Historical Reliance on Phone Company Criminality

By David Price

In 1971, Ron Rosenbaum's Esquire article, "Secrets of the Little Blue Box", introduced America to phone phreaks, a subterranean network of geek explorers who probed the global phone system as the world's largest pre-Internet interconnected machine. A star of Rosenbaum's piece was Joe Engressia, a blind telephonic hacking pioneer with perfect pitch and a high IQ, who seized control over phone systems by whistling dual-tone, multi-frequency pitches into telephone receivers.

Before the introduction of modern phone-switching technology, audible tones were used to connect phones with distant destinations. As a young child, Engressia was obsessed with the telephone, finding comfort within the steady blare of the dial tone. At the age of 5, he discovered he could dial the phone by clicking the receiver's hang-up switch, and at 7 he accidentally discovered that whistling specific frequencies could activate phone switches. From there, experimentation, brilliance, networking and perseverance led Engressia to probe weaknesses in the network that allowed him to make free phone calls. His mastery over this global machine was liberating, if not obsessive.

As Rosenbaum was completing his 1971 article, Engressia was arrested for theft of telephone services. At the time it appeared that the phone company had only recently become aware of his activities – though a few years earlier he had been expelled from the University of South Florida for selling fellow students long-distance calls for a dollar each.

Rosenbaum's 1971 piece put the spot-

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Memoir of a Brother from Another Planet

When One African Met Black America

By Pius Adesanmi

I met black America for the first time in 2005, after three years of living and teaching in America and one year before I returned to Canada. The long journey to this eventful meeting started in my father's library in Isanlu, a small town in central Nigeria. I came of age in Nigeria as the locust decades of military despotism set in, destroying everything, including what used to be known as the middle class. This class comprised a proud and hopeful generation that returned home from Cambridge, Oxford, Canterbury, Yale, Princeton and Harvard in the euphoric 1960s-1970s. After years of colonial humiliation in the hands of the British, a newly independent and proud Nigeria beckoned, and this generation answered enthusiastically. "Unity and Progress", "One Nigeria", and other such soporific mantras were on their lips as they fanned across the land, taking up jobs in every sector of national life. Those who joined the education sector took up positions in the universities; some joined high schools founded and run by Western Christian missions; some others joined public elementary schools all over the country.

Those who accepted teaching positions in rural missionary schools took the now rested culture of the family library with them to our villages. My father belonged in this category. Being more Catholic than the pope, he had hurried home from Dundee University in Scotland to be principal of a Catholic High School in Isanlu. Over the years, as our leadership transformed the Nigerian state into carrion and turned one of the world's richest geographies into Africa's most tragic embarrassment, my siblings and I would blame him to no end for that "ill-considered" decision. "Dad, why couldn't you just wait for the three of us to be born in the U.K. before rushing home?" We were in secondary school and could not understand why he denied us British citizenship. For most Nigerians of my generation, the passport of one responsible state in addition to your Nigerian passport, evidence of dual citizenship, is a vital insurance. Whenever the Nigerian state defaults on its responsibilities to you as a citizen, your second citizenship kicks in to save the day. But dad didn't wait. He returned to Nigeria with his books and a wife carrying his first child.

The family library became his most important asset, and he continued to expand it till he died in February 2007. I was practically raised in that library. As his last born and only son, there was nothing he enjoyed more than having me spend hours with him in there in my formative years. When we weren't reading, he was giving me long lectures on the value of knowledge, fulminating against the one thing he couldn't tolerate: "a mind that has not read books", to put it in his words. And by books he meant "serious books". Thus, while my secondary school mates enjoyed the delights of "soft" literature – James Hadley Chase, Nick Carter, Frederick Forsyth, and the Macmillan Pace Setters series – I was stuck in my father's library in the company of "serious writers". His vigilance, however, couldn't stop an underground addiction to Hadley Chase. Years later, I discovered the thematic thoroughness of my father's acquisitions: shelves of West African literature and history led to shelves of South African literature and history which, in turn, yielded to shelves of African-American literature and history. Colonialism. Apartheid. Slavery. These were the three great themes that informed my father's systematic acquisitions in black textual cultures, as his

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light on Engressia, as newspapers, magazines and television programs ran features on him and his activities. Engressia became a cultural icon, or proto-hacker stereotype, as characters with his abilities were written into cyberpunk novels and Hollywood screenplays with characters like Sneakers' Erwin 'Whistler' Emory.

Engressia's IQ loomed somewhere above 170, but as an adult he wished to live as a 5 years old, founding his own church, the Church of Eternal Childhood. His wish to remain an eternal child appears to be linked to the repeated sexual abuse he reported suffering from a nun at the school for the blind that he attended as a child, as well as the academic pressures that led him to miss out on playtime as a child. In 1991, Engressia legally changed his name to Joybubbles. Until his death this last year, Joybubbles ran a phone "story line" in Minneapolis, where callers would call and hear him tell a different children's story each week – adopting a cadence and personal style reminiscent of his hero, Mister Rogers.

When Joybubbles died last year, I used the Freedom of Information Act to request his FBI file, mostly just to see what the FBI had made of this explorer who had loved and wandered through this pre-Internet global network. I figured there might be something in his file relating to his 1971 arrest, but I hadn't expected to find an FBI and phone company investigation of him from two years before this arrest.

An August 28, 1969, FBI General Investigative Division report describes an investigation by Kansas City telephone company of three subjects in Kansas City, Miami and Chicago, who had "discovered a means to intercept and monitor WRS and Autovon" phone lines. Autovon (Automatic Voice Network) was a Defense Communication Agency telephone network used for nonsecure military phone communication. The FBI's report mistakenly claimed that Autovon was a "top secret telephone system utilized only by the White House", when in fact Autovon was really a nonclassified military telephone system, designed to link military installations even under the unpleasant conditions of nuclear annihilation.

The FBI believed that Engressia was "the 'brains' in this matter and was an electronics genius with an I.Q. of one hundred ninety". Even though the FBI's investigation had "not revealed any national security aspect to their activities" and phone company officials stated that this group's use of free phone calls had been "strictly for their own amusement and [the] harassment of [the] phone company", the FBI's investigation reports were filed under the heading: "Security matter – Espionage: interception of communications."

The FBI thought a blue box may have been used to avoid tolls, though they realized that Engressia "was capable of orally emitting a perfect twenty six hundred cycle tone, which could be used to direct distance dial any phone number in the country".

The FBI reported that without any authorization from law enforcement personnel, an employee of Southern Bell Telephone & Telegraph had contacted Engressia, interviewed him, and later gave information from this interview to the FBI. This employee told the FBI that "Joseph Engressia, age twenty and blind, [was] interviewed and he admitted intense interest in telephone company systems and equipment. He is familiar with the practices as to test numbers, circuits, and operations of telephone companies. Engressia exhibited ability to whistle twenty six hundred cycle notes which is utilized by telephone company in toll network. He claimed he learned majority of information by trial and error using his touch-tone instrument. He claimed he did not wish to violate any law and that his activities with the telephone were for amusement and education."

The FBI viewed Engressia as a real threat. On August 29, 1969, J. Edgar Hover sent a summary memo regarding Engressia's activities to John Ehrlichman, counselor to President Nixon, to Melvin Laird, secretary of defense, and to James J. Rowley, the director of the U.S. Secret Service. While Hoover apprised these governmental bodies of his investigation and expressed concerns that Engressia had the power to undertake undetectable wiretaps, the FBI had no actual evidence that Engressia intercepted any phone calls, they only had concerns about such powers.

Fortunately, the FBI employees processing my FOIA request accidentally revealed parts of the identities of the two phone phreaks mentioned in Engressia's file. An individual referred to as "also known as 'Tandy Way'" is identified as a blind radio and telephone enthusiast living in Miami, and a "Mr. Jacobs" is revealed as the Kansas City resident accessing free phone calls to talk with Engressia. Jacobs had first met Engressia after seeing him on Huntley-Brinkley TV show, and contacted him first by letter, then by phone.

The FBI report indicates that the phone company had known about Engressia's abilities for about a year:

"Joseph Engressia Jr. first came to the attention of the SBT&T Company in the summer of 1968. At about the same time there was a routine trouble report in the middle of August 1968, that was received by ___ showing a 'blue box' in use on the telephone number ___ Miami subscribed to by ___ Miami. ____ explained that a 'blue box' is a device that can be used to defraud the telephone company of the revenue from long-distance toll calls. This device produces multi-frequency tones which enable the user to make long-distance telephone calls and circumvent the billing equipment in the long-distance network".

It is not clear if Engressia was using an actual blue box (an electronic device designed to make free calls by generating 2600 hz through a speaker) or if he simply whistled into his phone to pro-

CounterPunch

EDITORS
Alexander Cockburn
Jeffrey St. Clair

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Alevtina Rea

BUSINESS
Becky Grant
Deva Wheeler

DESIGN
Tiffany Wardle

COUNSELOR
Ben Sonnenberg

CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
1-800-840-3683
counterpunch@counterpunch.org
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duce the same results. This Sept. 1, 1969, report includes an account of a Canadian operator reporting Engressia for selling LD phone calls for $1.00 each at the University of Southern Florida. Engressia was suspected and fined $25.00, "however, he was reinstated with full honors shortly thereafter".

An 8/29/69 FBI memo states that an employee "of the Florida Bell Telephone Company in Miami, Florida, illegally monitored conversations on Joe Engressia's telephone # 274-0760. It is further alleged that these monitored conversations were divulged by ____ [presumably the Florida Bell employee] to an unnamed FBI Agent in Miami, Florida". Later interviews confirmed that "the results of the monitoring [were] furnished to a Miami FBI Agent". Another FBI memo reports that FBI source, employed at Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, learned undisclosed information "by monitoring telephone conversation between [Jacobs] and Engressia".

On September 3, 1969, Jacobs wrote the FBI a detailed two-page letter extensively citing chapter and verse of the Communications Act and accusing the phone company and the FBI of violating wiretapping sections of the statute.

"I believe there has been a serious violation of the Communications Act of 1934, Section #605. Several days ago, FBI Kansas City agents ____ and ____visited my home and repeated back to me excerpts from a private conversation I had with a Mr. Joe Engressia (Tel: 274-0760) of Miami, Florida. Mr. Engressia for some time believed his phone was being monitored and in order to get the tapper to tip his hand, mentioned many words that might be of interest to the supposed tapper such as Autovon, etc. It is my information that a ____ of the Florida Bell Telephone Company has illegally monitored, recorded, and transcribed telephone conversations without the permission of the receiver and/or the sender and without a court order. ____ then divulged this conversation in the form of a written transcript to a Miami gent ____ who passed it on. Mssrs. ____ and ____ were good enough to confirm, in their visit to my home, that there had in fact been monitoring of a telephone line contrary to 47 U.S.C. 605".

Jacobs then threatened to expose the FBI's complicity in this illegal wiretap. He asked the FBI if they would fulfill their legal obligations to investigate his "allegations even though an FBI agent may indeed have been a part to the violation of 47 U.S.C. 605". The letter closed with a request that the FBI advise him what a U.S. attorney will do with this information.

The FBI released no memos or files from the following few days and then, five days later, there were an odd series of unconvincing memos that appear designed to establish a paper trail of plausible deniability, claiming (in contradiction to FBI report from 8/29/69) that the FBI had been given records illegally obtained by the phone company. A September 8, 1969, memo from the Kansas City Special Agent in Charge to Hoover has the agent now claiming he doubted that the information the Bureau received from the phone company employee was reliable.

The phone company's spying on Engressia was way out of bounds under 1969 laws.

The next day the FBI produced a memo designed formalizing its "story". A Miami FBI agent wrote Hoover claiming, "when interviewed Aug. 28 last by Bureau agents Miami, Re: Activities of Joseph Carl Engressia Jr. and [Jacobs] ____did not reveal telephone company had monitored telephone conversations between [Jacobs] and Engressia". Given that previous FBI reports stated that their conversations had been illegally monitored by the phone company and illegally shared with the FBI, this report appears to be a ham-handed effort to manufacture records later to be used if Jacobs pushed for an investigation of illegal wiretapping.

In 1967, the Supreme Court ruled in Katz v. United States that Fourth Amendment protections against unreasonable searches extended to telephone conversations, but the following year Congress added provisions to the 1968 Omnibus Crime Bill that fought the court's decision by identifying a list of specific crimes (kidnapping, organized crime, marijuana distribution, etc.) meriting wiretaps. But the phone company's spying on Engressia was way out of bounds under 1969 laws.

For a few days, the FBI re-circulated several versions of this same report; it was obviously feathering its nest in case of further legal inquiries at some point. The projected faux sotto voce tone of the FBI memos finds them pretending to "establish" that no actual records of illegally intercepted calls is comically damning. These track-covering memos are the last records appearing in Engressia's file.

It seems curious that an incident, which a matter of days earlier had been of such urgency that the counselor to the president, the secretary of defense, and the director of the Secret Service had been alerted, was so suddenly dropped so quickly and quietly, never to be mentioned again. That such a formerly urgent matter would be so quickly scuttled, set aside and forgotten is a strong measure of the threat Jacobs' accusations represented to the FBI and their special relationship with the phone company.

In those years, before Judge Harold Green broke up the phone monopoly and birthed the baby bells, it was easy for Hoover's FBI to maintain a special arrangement with the phone company - an arrangement under which the FBI ran warrantless wiretaps and pin registers largely as Hoover saw fit and with the phone company's compliance. No questions were asked. The public inspection of such matters would have threatened Hoover's special relationship with the phone company.

Fearing public disclosure of its illegal eavesdropping on Engressia, the phone company waited until 1971 to drop the bag on him, once some time had passed and Jacob's threats were no longer in play.

But this tale, even 37 years later, has relevance beyond the particulars of an ingenious blind renegade phone whistler. It is but one artifact of the largely unexplored history of the FBI's symbiotic enabling of the phone company's illegal wiretapping – a history with increasing relevance in the present, as the White House pressures Congress to provide immunity to a historically abusive industry, long protected by the sort of formal arrangements with law enforcement documented in these files. **CP**

David Price's *Anthropological Intelligence: The Deployment and Neglect of American Anthropology in the Second World War* is being published this month by Duke University Press. He can be reached at dprice@stmartin.edu.

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library grew to take up two large rooms in the family house. It was in this library that I encountered the names that would plunge me into an intricate web of trajectories and experiences that, years later, Paul Gilroy would make theoretically consumable as the Black Atlantic. From my senior years in secondary school and onward, my father's library ensured that names like Fredrick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, W.E.B. Du Bois, Countee Cullen, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Chester Himes, Stokely Carmichael, Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X entered my world in that small village in the middle of Nigeria. If my mom complained that some of the stuff was just too high for my level, he would counter dismissively that missionaries had already introduced him to Latin texts at my age.

My university training added the creation of a transcendental, borderless black world that privileged color, history, and memory above geography and nation. Thus, apartheid and slavery were also very much our experience, our property in those undergraduate lecture rooms in Nigeria. Our professors created a world of ideological intermeshing, in which W.E.B Du Bois, Malcolm X, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison were as much "our writers" as were Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and Ben Okri. Years later, the strictures of disciplinary boundary cutting in American academe, the exigencies of national identities, and the fractious politics and tensions of intra-black relations would unsettle the soporifics of this seamless black world I brought to the New World from Nigeria.

In the spring of 2005, I co-taught a graduate seminar in African and African-American drama with professor Charles Dumas, an African-American actor who has featured in a good number of Hollywood films and also makes appearances in the television drama, Law and Order. We had enough grant money to take the entire class to stage productions of black plays in Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and New York. Toward the end of the semester, we got word that an August Wilson play was on at the Yale Repertory Theatre. Charles could not come along, so I had to drive the entire class of ten white students to New Haven, Connecticut. At the play, it wasn't before I realized to my horror that I didn't understand anything the African-American actors were saying! Not a word. I strained and stretched my ears to no avail. This was pure Ebonics. It was one thing for me to strain my eardrums in the struggle to understand the fast-paced Ebonics of the comedian D.L. Hughley whenever he is on TV and another thing entirely to be in contact with flesh and blood Ebonics. As my frustration mounted, I had to rely on my students to whisper things to me. What's he saying? What's she saying? I kept asking. Then another shocking realization: here was a black professor asking his white students to interpret and make sense of black actors for him.

This jolting contact with non-academic, non-mainstreamed African-American idiom was only the beginning of a series of events that would take me to black America, away from the cocoon of academe. Shortly after the incident at Yale, I received an invitation from an old friend who had made it to America on a diversity visa lottery and was living on Staten Island, New York. As we hadn't seen each other in years, I wrote down his address and promised to spend an entire weekend with him. The trouble with MapQuest is that it takes you to a specific doorstep without telling you anything about the sociology of the neighborhood. As I approached my friend's address after a six-hour drive from Pennsylvania, I got an eerie sense of the familiar. Apart from the fact that I was familiar with the ghetto in West Africa and had visited South African townships, years of reading African-American writing and watching media stereotypes of the "hood", especially blaxploitation films, had given me a fairly good mental picture of America's black ghetto. Could my Nigerian friend possibly be living in the projects? Everything around me looked very much like the mental image I had of the ghetto.

But nothing of what I'd seen anywhere in Africa prepared me for that jolting contact with American poverty and squalor.

My suspicions were confirmed when I pulled up in front of my friend's huge apartment complex. He was waiting for me in front of the building and rushed to my car as soon as he saw me. We had no time for pleasantries before he exclaimed: "You can't park here. I'll take you to a friend's place. You'll leave your car there, and we'll come back here by bus." I let him in beside me in front. "What's the problem?" I asked. "You didn't tell me you drive a brand new Toyota Camry!" He explained that my car could attract hostility from folks in the neighborhood. I was bewildered, and it showed on my face. He explained that the idea of successful continental Africans coming to flaunt their success didn't always go down well.

On the bus back to his place, I finally got to ask him why he was living there if things were that bad. His was a classic case of the ill-informed African giving up far better conditions back home for the American eldorado. On winning the diversity lottery visa, he gave up a good job in Lagos, sold his belongings, and headed out to America only to discover that his Nigerian college of education diploma was meaningless in the U.S.A. He moved from one odd job to another until he ended up as a security guard on Staten Island. He became friends with an African-American co-worker who soon needed a roommate to help with the rent. "I did not join the American system at a level superior to the social and economic status of my roommate and most of the black folk in my neighborhood. I am not a candidate for resentment and intra-racial backlash. But you, you are a professor and all that".

I nodded and remarked that he had acquired some of the inflections and tonalities of Ebonics. I told him about my Yale experience. He laughed and added that language had also been the most serious obstacle to his integration when he moved to that neighborhood. His African-American friends had trouble with his heavily accented Nigerian English but resented it when he confessed to having trouble with Ebonics. How could the brotha from Africa take on airs and pretend not to understand them? Eventually things smoothened out, and he blended and made very good friends. We arrived at his building, and he led the way into the lobby. One look at my surroundings - and my heart sank.

Nothing of what I'd seen anywhere in Africa prepared me for that jolting con-

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tact with American poverty and squalor. More scatological evidence of the black condition confronted me as we negotiated the long, dark, crowded and grimy corridor leading to the two-bedroom apartment my host shared with his African-American friend and co-worker. Turned out he left out one significant detail: Rashonda, his roommate's younger sister, was also crashing with them. Rashonda was a single mother with two young kids from two different men: a baby mama.

I had walked into a situation that assembled every imaginable American stereotype of the black community. Unfortunately, the mainstream America of gloss and chrome at the source of these stereotypes has never tried to project mentally into the black condition. I was introduced to our African-American hosts as a cousin visiting from Pennsylvania. By now, I'd learnt that my being a university professor was an inconvenient detail that my Nigerian friend was reluctant to let out in the circumstances. The sociology of interactions in that building and neighborhood was Africa on display. People moved in and out of one another's spaces and apartments without the encumbrances that have emptied social interaction of all humanizing value in the West. Shouts of "yo" and "whaz up ma nigga" were ubiquitous. Four hundred years of violent separation from the source - and they still remembered those modes of interaction. I became part of the to-ing and fro-ing between apartments and spaces.

My hosts took me to fraternize with "otha brothas and sistas". All the places I saw told the same story of roaches, rats, overcrowding, drugs, despondency, hopelessness, and the black anger that surprised white America when the Rev. Jeremiah Wright treated them to an infinitesimal cinder from the smoldering crucible they have sat on and repressed for four hundred years . The black folk who received me so warmly were still saddled with the dud American check that Martin Luther King Jr. had complained about so many years ago. Some forty years after his death, they still cannot cash the check of America's promise: no sufficient funds.

No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't blend. They caught a whiff of the continent the moment they saw me, even before my accent gave things away. Everywhere we went, I was moved by the brotherhood and fellowship that was extended to me in the middle of so much poverty. We would gather in someone's apartment to drink and talk late into the night. I gave them Africa; they gave me a black America that had been the stuff of scholarly discourse and texts for me until that moment. I tried to teach them Nigerian Pidgin English, and they gave me lessons in Ebonics and black argot. Ultimately, the interactions revealed the damage wrought by the great historical chasm. The questions they asked me about Africa were simply unbelievable, as unbelievable as some of my own facile assumptions about them. The divide-and-rule brainwash of America had inscribed Africa in their imagination as a better-forgotten oasis of original savagery, a horrifying mixture of Hobbes' "state of nature" and Conrad's "heart of darkness". "Yo, dem folks have cars in Africa?" "Like here?" And the incredulity, when my friend and I replied in the affirmative. My friend was elated. "I told you so", he gloated.

I tried as much as I could to disentangle Africa: to present it to them as a diverse geography of some fifty-four countries as opposed to the homogeneous, singular basket of savagery that America had woven into their imagination. As they told me about their own gory experiences in the America of the year 2005, I had to quickly unlearn my privileges and reduce my ignorance of the black experience in America. Unless you're a black person from white settlerist South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, or Kenya, the mountain of quotidian racial oppressions and institutionalized discrimination that African Americans load into the expression, "white folk", may not resonate for you as fiercely and as urgently as it does for them. You may not start and end every sentence with "white folk", and your interlocutors could get impatient with you. What, for you, has become colonial history is still, for them, painful daily reality.

As I drove back to Pennsylvania at the end of what had been a road-to-Damascus experience, my emotions oscillated between joy and sadness. I was glad that I had had the opportunity to meet black America outside of the gloss of seminar rooms, conference venues, and the text. I was saddened by the realization that I was not unlike so many other continental African intellectuals, who spend decade after decade in America without ever going beyond the black America of the text, seminar rooms, and conference venues, and who often indulge in authoritative pronouncements on the African-American condition. We make friends with African-American colleagues. Sometimes the friendship gets so strong we become family. Yet we hardly ever ask to be taken to the roots and routes they navigated to academe – and the mountains they overcame along the way. I realized I'd never been "home" with any of my African-American family.

Back in Pennsylvania, I phoned a cousin who was a student in Alabama. I told him I needed a road trip in rural Alabama and Mississippi in the summer of 2005 to continue my education. He laughed and told me that what I saw in the state of New York was black luxury and not poverty as I had imagined. "I will show you black poverty when you come to the South". He was right. We spent a whole month traveling in America's black poverty belt in the South. In certain places, it felt like the plantation was still alive

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Published twice monthly except July and August, 22 issues a year.

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and healthy. Only Massa was gone. Here were Americans poorer than anybody I have ever met in Africa, American towns and neighborhoods more indigent than anything I'd seen in Africa.

Today, as I listen to Barack Obama and John Edwards talk about the two Americas that need to be brought together, I marvel at the distance between their politically correct politician-speak and reality. Contrary to Obama and Edwards, there are no two Americas. America is a minimum of four planets separated by violence and unending injustice: a Hispanic planet, a Native-American planet, a black American planet, and planet white America . The first three planets orbit around the blazing fourth, which has located itself as the sun. Although planet white America has been to the moon and is assiduously studying Mars preparatory to a visit within the next twenty years, it has never visited any of the three chromatized planets orbiting around it. It doesn't even feel the need to project mentally into those three planets, hence the shock with which it received the anger of Jeremiah Wright.

The road to any therapeutic contact between planet white America and the other American planets it has never met lies first and foremost in the attuning of the most sensitive body part in planet white America: the ears. The ears of planet white America are so sensitive that there are way too many truths it does not want to hear about the reality of America as lived and experienced daily by those on the colored planets it has never visited. America's many inconvenient truths tend to hurt those ears, so it is better to repress them. Katrina. Jena. Jeremiah Wright's voice, screaming from the black planet, grated on those sensitive ears. What I learned from my conversations with the black America that I met in the course of my education is the feeling that after recording successes in the Civil Rights struggle to be seen in America, they are now simply never heard.

When those ears have been attuned, America will also have to resolve the clash between memory and non-memory. The history of America has evolved in such a way that planet white America either cannot afford the luxury of memory or can only tolerate the most doctored, sanitized memory that eventuates robotically in narratives of the world's "only good country". Any contrarian memory, such as defines the trajectory and humanity of Jeremiah Wright and black America, is a dangerous threat to the orthodoxy of a neatly packaged national self-image. Until America resolves the clash between memory and its negation, the words of Ralph Ellison which I encountered years ago in an essay, "If the Twain Shall Meet", will always be waiting for America around the corner, just when it thinks it has turned that corner: "It would seem that the basic themes of our history may be repressed in the public mind, but like corpses in mystery dramas, they always turn up again – and are frequently more troublesome". **CP**

This essay is dedicated to my father, Alfred Dare Adesanmi, who flew away home one bright morning when his work was over.

Pius Adesanmi is an associate professor, Dept. of English Language & Literature, and director of the Project on New African Literatures at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. He can be reached at piusadesanmi@gmail.com.

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